

Message Text

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43

ACTION AF-06

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SCS-03 SCA-01 SS-15 NSC-05 PRS-01 L-02

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R 141250Z APR 75

FM AMEMBASSY TANANARIVE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7154

C O N F I D E N T I A L TANANARIVE 0688

X.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: CASC MA (REPPAS, GEORGE S)

SUBJECT: W/W: REPPAS' DISAPPEARANCE

REF: TANANARIVE 0647

1. ON APRIL 12 BOTH OFFICIAL DAILY INFORMATION BULLETIN AND THE ISLAND'S ONLY FRENCH DAILY, MADAGASCAR MATIN, CARRIED IDENTICAL ARTICLES ON REPPAS' DISAPPEARANCE. UNDER HEADING, "WHERE DID REPPAS GO?" ARTICLE STARTS BY EXPLAINING HOW REPPAS WAS "PLACED UNDER THE PROTECTION AND RESPONSIBILITY OF THE EMBASSY" FOLLOWING FIGHTING THAT TOOK PLACE NEAR PRISON IN FEBRUARY. REST OF ARTICLE INACCURATELY REPORTS SUBSEQUENT EVENTS. IT STATES THAT DIRECTOR OF PENAL SERVICES NOTICED THAT REPPAS HAD NOT RETURNED TO PRISON AS HE SHOULD HAVE MARCH 7 AND ON MARCH 18 INFORMED EMBASSY THAT HE SHOULD RETURN. VICE CONSUL THEN INFORMED MINISTRY OF JUSTICE OF REPPAS' DISAPPEARANCE ON APRIL 2 ACCORDING TO ARTICLE. THIS, OF COURSE, IS UNTRUE. EMBASSY WAS TOLD BY FOREIGN OFFICE NOTE THAT REPPAS SHOULD RETURN TO PRISON MARCH 27 AND EMBASSY INFORMED FOREIGN OFFICE OF HIS ABSENCE MARCH 28.

2. EMBASSY COMMENT: SOURCE OF STORY IS GIVEN AS CLAUDE RATSIMIHENA, DIRECTOR OF PENAL SERVICES (REFTEL), WHO MAY HAVE DISTORTED FACTS TO AVOID EMBARRASSMENT TO MINISTRY OF JUSTICE. MISREPRESENTATION OF EMBASSY ROLE COULD HAVE BEEN WORSE, AND ARTICLE NOT HOSTILE IN TONE. GIVEN
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SEVERAL DAYS THAT ELAPSED BETWEEN CALL TO EMBASSY BY

MAD PRESSE APRIL 7 (REFTEL) AND APPEARANCE OF THIS REPORT
ON APRIL 12, EMBASSY SUSPECTS GOMR WEIGHED CAREFULLY HOW
THEY WOULD HANDLE DISCLOSURE OF REPPAS' DISAPPEARANCE.
GOMR'S LOW-KEY HANDLING OF AFFAIR SO FAR IS POSITIVE SIGN,
ALTHOUGH FURTHER PUBLICITY IS EXPECTED, ESPECIALLY WHEN
REPPAS' WHEREABOUTS BECOMES KNOWN. IN ADDITION,
EMBASSY ANTICIPATES NOTE FROM MOFA FOR RECORD CHARGING
EMBASSY WITH ""RESPONSIBILITY" IN SOME WAY. EMBASSY
BELIEVES, HOWEVER, THAT IT WILL BE ABLE TO RIDE OUT
AFTERMATH OF REPPAS' DISAPPEARANCE WITHOUT TOO MUCH STRAIN
IN US-GOMR RELATIONS.
MENDENHALL

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